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DIMENSIONS OF THE COUNSELOR'S RELATIONSHIPS.

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THE PUPIL PERSONNEL SERVICES CONCEPT EMPHASIZES A TEAM APPROACH. AN INHERENT WEAKNESS IN THIS CONCEPT IS THE TENDENCY TOWARD COMPARTMENTALIZATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL. A NATURAL RELATIONSHIP EXISTS BETWEEN GUIDANCE AND INSTRUCTION BECAUSE BOTH DEAL WITH THE PUPIL, GUIDANCE WITH CONATIVE ASPECTS AND INSTRUCTION WITH COGNITIVE ASPECTS. THE STRATEGIES WHICH ARE COMMONLY EMPLOYED IN GUIDANCE--REMEDIAL, PREVENTATIVE, AND PROMOTIONAL--PROMOTE STRUCTURING WHICH CAUSES THE INDIVIDUAL TO LOSE FLEXIBILITY. SELF-CONCEPT IS RELATED TO SUCCESSFUL FUNCTIONING IN LEARNING AND IN LATER ADJUSTMENT TO LIFE. COUNSELORS HELP CHILDREN FORM SELF-CONCEPTS BY AIDING THEM TO DEVELOP VALUES. POOR TASK DEFINITION CAUSES ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELORS TO ADOPT PROCEDURES USED WITH OLDER CHILDREN. COGNITION PLUS EMOTION (RATIONAL THERAPY) SEEMS EFFECTIVE IN CHANGING BEHAVIOR. COUNSELORS SHOULD DEVELOP A PARTICULAR PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE AND DEVELOP THEIR PERCEPTUAL ORGANIZATION RATHER THAN MASTER COUNSELING TECHNIQUES AND THEORY. THE ESSENTIAL PROCEDURE USED IN TEACHER CONSULTATION IS EXPLORATION OF SELF-CONCEPT. THIS PROCEDURE CREATES CONFLICT WITHIN THE TEACHER BETWEEN A DESIRE TO HELP A CHILD, AND TIME AND KNOWLEDGE LIMITATIONS. AS ORGANIZATION OF THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DOES NOT PROVIDE OPPORTUNTIES FOR REGULAR CONSULTATION BETWEEN COUNSELORS AND TEACHERS, PLANS FREEING TEACHERS FOR PROFESSIONAL TASKS OTHER THAN TEACHING ARE BENEFICIAL. THIS IS ONE OF THE REPORTS FROM THE ZION CONFERENCE AND THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DEMONSTRATION CENTERS INCLUDED IN "ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GUIDANCE IN ILLINOIS." (FS)

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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GUIDANCE IN ILLINOIS

Reports from the Zion Conference and
The Elementary School Demonstration Centers

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DIMENSIONS OF THE COUNSELOR'S RELATIONSHIPS

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In an insightful article, Doctor Kaczkowski points to some of the "real" situations encountered in elementary school guidance. He offers specific suggestions as to the procedures to be followed and the kinds of relationships to be established and maintained by the counselor.

In the past year or two, elementary school guidance has received a considerable amount of attention. This attention will reach meteoric proportion in the next few years, partly because of the inherent values in this type of guidance program, and partly because of the additional State and Federal money available for the execution of the program. However, a moments reflection on the situation will point to the fact that ideas about what constitutes an elementary school guidance program are not necessarily new. For example, the New York City school system had developed a rather comprehensive program in 1955.[1] What is new is the fact that most school systems are trying to develop a rationale for the ongoing guidance programs. Schools have become aware of the fact "that one professional person cannot be all things to all people".[2]

One of the basic problems in the development of a rationale for an elementary guidance program is that of relating the activity to pupil personnel services and instructional programs. The former concept not only embraces guidance services but such activities as attendance, health services, special psychological services, visiting teacher, etc. The problem posed by the pupil personnel services concept is that of coordinating the effort of the various specialists such as counselors, nurses, school psychologist, school social worker, psychometrist, etc. Since each "expert" is interested in some "part" of the student, it is essential that a team approach be evolved so that the total child can be considered. The inherent weakness in the service concept is that of compartmentalization of the individual to a point where it is virtually impossible to bring the pieces together again, in any meaningful fashion.

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Generally speaking, three strategies are usually employed to reach the typical goals of guidance: remedial, preventative, and promotional.[3] Stewart and Warnath define these terms in the following manner:

> Remedial guidance is concerned with the correcting of some aspect of the maturation process that has gone awry. Preventative guidance discovers and removes blocks in the environment that could potentially handicap the development of the individual.
>
> Promotional guidance is concerned with promoting those skills, attitudes, and habits that lead to becoming a fully functioning person.[4]

The inherent weakness in these strategies as they are commonly executed is that it leads to considerable amount of social engineering. The activities are so structured that the individual loses a high degree of flexibility. He is incapable in achieving what Patterson calls "responsible independence".[5] The attitude of "I know what is best for you" must be avoided by the counselor. It is easy to adopt this attitude especially when dealing with elementary school children. The counselor (and the teacher) by virtue of maturity, training, and experience at this level of instruction, at times, tends to overlook the uniqueness aspect of the child while in the process of assisting him in becoming a socialized being within society.

To many staff members, the relationship between guidance activities and instructional aspects appear to be worlds apart. For the most part the instructional phase is viewed as basically inculcating basic skills and knowledges. The gap between the two widens as one proceeds up the instructional ladder. However, some of the early definitions of guidance stated that guidance was concerned with the individualization of instruction.[6] If one examines the situation carefully, a high degree of relationship between instruction and guidance should exist. This is not to imply that every teacher is a counselor, but that the entire school staff can make vital contributions to the

guidance program. This is largely due to the fact that they work with the same materials: PUPILS. The individual student in his quest to answer "Who am I?" needs the services of both types of activities. Each can enhance his self-concept by providing a sense of identity and a ground for reality testing.[7] A coordinated effort is required because the general focus of activity in the classroom is on the cognitive aspects while guidance programs, particularly counseling, can deal with emotion and feeling.

Lafferty believes that "there is overwhelming evidence that self-concept is related to successful function in learning and in later adjustment in life".[8]

> Parents should be extremely sensitive to the attitudes they express toward children... It is important that children be referred to with warmth, appreciation, encouragement, and confidence rather than with criticism, disparagement, and disappointment.
>
> The fact that concepts of self are reflections of the attitudes expressed toward a person by others indicates the power that parents and teachers have in determining the kind of selves that children will develop.[9]

There is a belief among some schoolmen that a bulk of reading problems are due to improper self-functioning rather than in lacking skill and know how in reading. Gordon Allport points out that teachers are very skillful in teaching matters of fact.[10] However, matters of importance (his terms for values) are rarely discussed in class. Yet the child needs values to evaluate things in order to develop his self-concept which, in turn, affects his life style. Lecky, in developing his concept of "self-consistency", points out how self-identity and reality may have little congruency. "The very fact that we strive to be true to ourselves involves resistance to acceptance

of that which is inconsistent. Thus, resistance may be recognized as normal and necessary. Indeed, a unified organization (person) could not be maintained without it."[11] In other words, a person who considers himself a poor speller (and has this idea continually reinforced by the teacher) cannot be helped by remedial procedures unless his attitude toward spelling, and in turn about himself, is altered. Lecky, in citing some of his experimental work in the area of spelling, points to individuals who have "unconsciously" set a goal of so many misspelled words per page. Words spelled correctly on one page are misspelled on another in order to maintain the "proper quota". In an elementary school setting, a counselor can play a vital role in helping the teacher recognize the existence of this type of problem. In addition, he can, with the help of the teacher and other staff members, reduce the debilitating effects of this condition.

A casual look at the literature in the field of elementary guidance reveals that the task of the counselor tends to be defined in general rather than specific terms.[12] The duties typically mentioned are: counseling, group work, screening, test administration, parent conferences, consulting with teachers, working with underachievers, in-service training, remedial work, etc. On occasion, explicit tasks are spelled out. Many of the neophyte counselors looking for specific techniques tend to find a couple of them after arduous labor. They are not found in typical educational sources. Since the cupboard is bare, there is a tendency to adopt, without careful examination, techniques and procedures used with adolescents and adults. Chaos is bound to result in situations in which a strictly cognitive approach is used in the resolution of a problem.

One of the biggest stumbling blocks is the matter of vocabulary. The adult meaning of a word and a second grader's interpretation of the word can literally be world's apart. The writer was exploring with a second grader the types of things he

liked to do. The pupil said that one of his favorite pastimes was to watch the "late show" on TV. At times, it was easy to form a hypothesis that the lack of sufficient sleep could contribute to the boy's poor performance in school. Tempered by the counseling approach, the discussion centered on the importance of the "late show" in the boy's life. It soon became apparent to the writer that the boy's examination of the situation was a bit incongruous. So, for the point of clarification, he asked the boy, "what did he mean by the "late show". "Well I call the 'early show' the 'late show' because I am fifteen minutes late in seeing the start of the movie."

Of the myriad of tasks allotted to the elementary school counselor, two of them tend to concern him the most: counseling and consulting with teachers. The latter activity is one of the most frequent tasks mentioned, while at the same time being the least defined in explicit terms. Usually, vague generalities are offered as the kinds of things about which the counselor is "consulted". After digesting a typical listing, a counselor feels that he has to play the role of a supervisor, principal, and confessor. To add to the anxiety of the counselor, the lists of the kinds of things he counsels about are as vague as the list on consultation, or are simply transpositions of what goes on in interviews with adults. It is hoped that a supervised practicum can alleviate most of the fears of the neophyte elementary school counselor. The next few paragraphs will explore these two concerns to a larger degree.

Most textbooks define counseling as a "relationship", and by maintaining this "relationship" a change in behavior will occur. Lafferty contrasts two types of approaches in counseling:

> These (therapies) are essentially based upon the idea that some children grow up in a situation where they have never had or experienced a close relationship with a mature adult, and therefore by replacing this lack with a

relationship in a psychotherapeutic situation the youngster is able to change his behavior. While this is a simply stated idea it is, perhaps, one of the most important cornerstones of the schools current attempts to alter behavior in children.... Still another system may be referred to as supportive therapy, a system under which a significant or mature adult takes interest in a youngster and lets him know that this adult will stand with the youngster. The person essentially sympathizes and lets the youngster know that he can understand the nature of his concerns, worries, etc. It is a sustaining form of therapy and few of its advocates maintain that it produces much in the way of drastic change in behavior.... This writer does not wish to infer that these are essentially ineffective schools of thought, but rather raise the question of whether or not we should look for other, more immediate ways of altering behavior. The proposition stated above may be restated simply: There are no known totally effective ways in which behavior might be altered.[13]

Essentially, Lafferty is drawing attention to the idea that a strictly cognitive approach tends not to be effective in changing behavior of pupils. What is needed is another ingredient: emotion. By combining cognition with emotion we have Ellis's notion of rational therapy.[14] The keynote in understanding this therapy is the idea that emotions in reality are biased, prejudiced, opinionated, etc., forms of thinking. Inherent in the concept is Lecky's notion of "self-consistency". "Neurosis, in other words, consists of stupid behavior by a non-stupid person."[15]

As mentioned earlier, counselors tend to feel that they are hindered rather than helped by counseling theory. The above explication is a good example of some of

the problems encountered by a counselor when he tries to translate theory into action. "Is there any way I can become a 'good counselor' without being weighted down with a myriad of counseling approaches?" Fortunately, an article by Coombs and Soper can provide a partial answer to the dilemma.[16]

In reviewing the literature, Coombs and Soper state, "...effective relationships seem dependent upon the nature of the helper's attitudes and ways of perceiving himself, his tasks, his client, and his purpose".[17] They observe that Rogers concluded "that almost any kind of behavior may be helpful to an individual if the intent of the helper is to help".[18] They conclude that

> "Apparently, what makes an effective professional worker is a question not of what methods he uses, but of how well he has learned to use his unique self as an instrument for working with other people."[19]

In their own particular study, Coombs and Soper list the following characteristics of effective counselors: (1) perceive from an internal rather than an external frame of reference; (2) see in terms of people rather than things; (3) see people as able rather than unable; (4) see people as dependable rather than undependable; (5) see people as friendly rather than unfriendly; (6) see people as worthy rather than unworthy; (7) see themselves as identified with people rather than apart from people; (8) able to cope with own problems; (9) not afraid to reveal his true self; (10) tries to free people rather than control them; (11) is altruistic rather than narcissistic; (12) is concerned with larger rather than smaller meanings.[20]

One can generalize from the above study that it is more important to have internalized a particular philosophy of life rather than a set of techniques. It is the attitudes that a counselor brings into the "relationship" that maintain it rather than a bag of tricks. That "change" is brought about by the counselor acting as an

agent of the client rather than an agent for society. Consequently, counselors should be more concerned about their perceptual organization rather than their ability to master counseling theory. Performing a personal synthesis in regarding one's self-concept is more important than striving to achieve an "A" in a guidance course.

In addition to counseling, the other major concern of elementary school counselors is that of "consulting with teachers". Very often, this is reduced to generalizing on mental health aspects of classroom management procedures. It is true that classroom teachers are vitally concerned with adverse results of some of their actions. The eternal question asked is "Did I do right in this case?" This question can be interpreted in many ways, all of which focus on the sense of worth of the asker. "Do I dare admit the fact that at times I feel imperfect in my relationship with others?" "What will my students think of me now?"

The essential procedure used with the teacher is the same as used with the pupil: exploration of the self-concept. The typical problem faced by the teacher is that of conflict; I would like to help Johnny, but I am not willing (as yet) to do it at the "expense" of 25 other pupils. There is no tailor-made solution for this type of problem. By establishing a "relationship" the problem can be alleviated for most teachers. Another type of problem is that of the failing student. Most teachers feel that this type of person should receive some type of help. However, the counselor does not offer assistance in the form of outlining remedial procedures, but looking for the emotional blocks to learning. This means observing the student in a variety of situations and employing sociometric procedures. It means using tests not necessarily for assessment or diagnostic purposes, but appraising performance in stress situations. Very often, the report on a "failing" student will place the teacher in a conflict situation. "From this

report I gather that it is my attitude toward the youngster that may be responsible for his poor reading. It cannot be so. After all, all I have been telling him is that he is a poor reader."

This type of consultation brings into focus an organizational problem on the elementary level. When and where are you going to do it? First of all, you need a private setting to carry this type of interaction. The typical teachers' lounge affords very little privacy. It calls for an office removed from the heavy traffic of the school. The classroom can be used for this consultation. However, the classroom is usually filled with children. It is surprising what big ears children do have. If the conversation is held in the hallway, the teacher is continually worried about what is going on within the classroom. After all, in most schools the amount of noise reflects the degree of discipline the teacher can enforce. The end result is a squirming teacher who is interested in a quick solution rather than an exploration of the problem. In addition, the consultations are to be crowded during a limited time period: before school, after school, recess, and lunch hour. For the most part, these prove unsatisfactory because you may have more requests for consultation than there is time to carry out. To keep everyone happy, the counselor may resort to prescribing a favorite remedy: try to understand the youngster.

The solution to the above problems may be in reorganizing the elementary school. A departmentalized approach that frees the teacher for professional tasks other than teaching would yield many benefits. For example, when the music, art, or physical education teacher conducts the class, the teacher could schedule a time block to consult with the counselor, parent, nurse, etc., about a given youngster in an unhurried fashion. The biggest single drawback of this plan is that it costs money to hire extra teachers. A variation of the plan is to hire a single "floating" substitute to take over the class when consultation is deemed appropriate.

There is one other problem that arises when the counselor acts as a consultant to the staff. What kind of interaction should the counselor have outside the "professional" contact he has made with the teachers? Can he be one of the "boys" and engage in idle banter or partake in drinking coffee with some teachers during recess? Most counselors see nothing wrong with participating in these types of activities. After all, Snygg and Soper feel that effective counselors identify themselves with people rather than apart from them.[21] The writer's observations on this issue have lead him to conclude that his effectiveness as a consultant is reduced the more time he spends being "one of the boys". Why? First of all, it takes away time from doing his task as a consultant. Second, it reduces his availability to the staff. Third, it tends to reduce "consultant periods" to gossip time. Fourth, it effects the degree of trust that the staff have in the counselor. Is he going to talk about me to somebody else? This does not mean that the counselor does not partake in any social activities with the rest of the school staff. It does mean that he must be continually aware of the great professional responsibility he has when he deals with other staff members. His aloofness is a sign that he cares to give his best to all concerned.

There are many other types of interactions that should be discussed. Among them are parent conferences, relationship with the administration, relationship with other members of the pupil personnel team such as nurses, school psychologists, social workers, etc. Because they have just been enumerated rather than discussed does not mean that they are unimportant. All of the aforementioned deal with the pupils in some way: therefore, are important to the overall success of the guidance program and more important, to the self-enchantment of each pupil within the school. However, time only permits a cursory mention of their contribution to the guidance program.

The writer has tried to point out some of the problems that confront the elementary school counselor. Those problems which he has highlighted are those

which have frequently shown up during his brief work as an elementary school counselor. Probably, in another setting some other concerns would have shown up. Perhaps, many are confused rather than helped by this exposition. In order to help you out of the darkness and lead you towards the light, the following conclusion is offered:

By virtue of your training as an elementary school counselor you have one asset that most staff members lack. Because of this one talent you are in a position to enter into a unique relationship with pupils, teachers, parents, administrators, etc. The hope given through the relationship is unmeasurable. What is this gift that you have? You, better than anyone else in the school, are able to deal with "affect". It is not your sophistication in dealing with test data or ability to draw sociograms that make you invaluable. It is your ability to deal with feelings and emotions that make you valuable. It is your ability to deal with feelings and emotions that make you unique. Techniques become unimportant when you want to help an individual to become a person. Your training can very often help make this a reality.

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